

Roadtest

Finding a simpler way of sharing

Broadway Malyan has long been a happy user of Autodesk's Buzzsaw project collaboration tool. But now the practice is migrating to a rival product, explains the practice's IT director Simon Johns

Our use of extranets began five years ago when the need to be able to shift large amounts of project-related data to our clients and significant others in ever shorter time frames became an absolute necessity.

Email can be a great tool, but its use today has become somewhat of a chore. It is able to move files about, but there are limits. It is not secure. It is not guaranteed. It does not handle files well — especially large ones associated with CAD or graphics. Email is a common vector for viruses, spam, Trojans, phishing and a host of other nasties associated with modern living. In short, it is not suited for the secure, commercial, timely transmission of data.

Project extranets offer many features that enable the movement of files around the internet. With built-in file viewers, "anytime, anyplace" access to these files is possible. While there are many, many extranets-in-a-box to choose from, we chose Buzzsaw from Autodesk. To us, this seemed the obvious choice — we had an existing investment in



Construction of Broadway Malyan's Met Office in Exeter was aided by using Buzzsaw.

Autodesk's Architectural Desktop and Buzzsaw integrates into this well.

Our file transmission is secure and guaranteed. Buzzsaw uses FTP to upload and download files. It is available as an application and also as a browser-based version, enabling access from anywhere. The application is easily installed and updated without any special permissions. When

files are uploaded the project team is notified, and a link in the email can take you straight to the new files, which can then be viewed or downloaded for further modification. This feature has worked to Broadway Malyan's advantage where project teams work in offices across Europe and with associate offices internationally. All have access to the same data in the knowledge that

changes can be seen quickly and cheaply.

File access is recorded, with user, time and date information. This is often useful when one party forgets that they have reviewed drawings already and have had access to the information for quite a while.

The files in Buzzsaw are stored across the globe — data is mirrored between sites in the US and Europe. This feature is something most architects (and, let's face it, the larger practices are only really small to medium enterprises) could never afford out of their IT budgets. So the ability to buy web space in a cutting-edge project extranet, and buy into all features such as these, is almost a dream come true.

Buzzsaw offers many features that are useful to the construction process — there are many project management tools which are easily customised. But we at Broadway Malyan only use it for the storage of project files and a few other choice items. These project files could be AutoCAD drawings, and Buzzsaw's ability to link

in reference files automatically is a great time-saving feature and one of the reasons why we chose it. These could be large, print-ready PDF or JPG files for transmission to the printers or a repro house, thereby saving time and effort in burning CDs and biking, and allowing for documents to be worked on right up to the wire.

Our IT team also uses Buzzsaw for the delivery of new software packages, using higher bandwidth internet lines rather than dedicated quality lines. In this way they can move gigabytes of data to other office servers for local installation. We have rolled out our main CAD package, Architectural Desktop, in this manner as well as many multi-CD graphics packages.

The management of Buzzsaw is simple and this simplicity is of great benefit to architects big and small, as it speeds up the publication process — which is, after all, why we are using it. But it also allows for precise publication to the correct people. This layer of integrity is easy to set up and no real understanding of computer security is needed.

So what is the future for Buzzsaw at Broadway Malyan? We have benefited greatly from its use, but we touch only the edge of the product and have no need for its more complicated features. With this in mind, over the coming months we will be migrating our projects and data to another system which will allow greater flexibility in the way we can operate our extranet. Unlike Buzzsaw, the new licensing model will no longer limit us to the amount of gigabytes stored on a foreign server or number of users able to access the site. We will be free to publish what we want to whom without having to think about the financial implications. This is not without its issues, but they become internalised and can be

dealt with far more effectively. We already have the infrastructure; as a multi-national practice we have large network connections and the necessary security.

The software we will use is a spin-off from RedSky IT project portal Informate, which was purchased to give job leaders and directors better financial information in running their jobs. By switching on extra modules, Informate will be capable of replacing Buzzsaw, making the whole exercise sterling neutral (that is, the cost of buying Informate will be cancelled out by migrating away from Buzzsaw). There are many other features of this portal we will aim to exploit in future, but this one gives us dividends that make the project pay for itself.

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The future of our project extranet can now be branded exactly as we wish, and who knows where it will end — maybe it will contain streaming movies of fly-throughs and other media-rich applications.

Buzzsaw is a great product which, in our opinion, is better than many of its competitors because it is simple to use. At the end of the day, what more could we want? But that very simplicity for us is its downfall when we can use another product to achieve the same aims at no cost.

● **Buzzsaw details are available at www.autodesk.com/buzzsaw**
● **Information on RedSky IT (formerly Ramesys Construction Services) can be found by visiting www.redskyit.com**